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UDOT will use new interchange in American Fork

Janice Peterson - Daily herald

Transportation officials are working to alleviate congestion around the county through the Access Utah County project, and some new innovative designs may do the trick.

Utah Department of Transportation spokesman Scott Thompson said a brand new design will be used for the American Fork Main Street interchange on Interstate 15. The Diverging Diamond Interchange, or DDI, will be put in place to improve traffic flow in the area.

The design involves a major east-west artery that crisscrosses over the freeway with only two signals and a free flow of traffic on and off the freeway. Thompson said the idea is an improvement over single-point urban interchanges, like the on-ramp at University Parkway in Orem, because commuters will make only one stop instead of four or five.

"All of the left turns and right turns on and off the interchange, people won't have to stop," he said.

Thompson said the design is new in the United States, but not for the rest of the world. American Fork will be the first place in the western United States to have such an interchange, while Springfield, Mo., will be building one at the same time.

"It's relatively new for the U.S., though they have been using this interchange technology in Europe," he said.

The design has several advantages over other, more common interchanges. Thompson said it will be laid out flatter than other designs and only uses two bridges over the freeway. It also uses less right of way and should be safer for motorists.

"The advantage of it for us is we feel it moves traffic more efficiently and safely," he said.

Thompson said the bridges over the freeway will be constructed off-site, similar to the recent work on Interstate 80 in Salt Lake City. When the bridges are complete, they will be moved into place and traffic will only need to be interrupted for a short time.

"We're not going to affect the property owners around that interchange as much as we might have," he said. SCIB Although the interchange should be much more effective than other designs, Thompson said he does not know whether it will be used again for other projects. Officials will monitor its effectiveness before deciding whether the design should be used again. It may also not be the most cost-effective strategy for every situation, which designers must take into account.

"We want to be innovative, but we also want to be good stewards of the taxpayers' money," he said.

Bryan Adams, UDOT Access County director, said the project will cost approximately \$250 million in its entirety, which will include nearly 6 miles of roadway. The interchange is part of the Pioneer Crossing project, which will create a new thoroughfare from Saratoga Springs to American Fork through Lehi.

"Really, what this project is all about is trying to alleviate traffic off of Lehi Main Street," he said.

Lehi Main Street is the major east-west corridor in the area at the moment, so the project will greatly reduce congestion in a quickly growing area of the county. Adams said some phases of the work should start within the next month and the roadway will be complete in fall 2009. The interchange will take until 2010 to complete, but Adams said traffic should not be hampered by the work in the meantime.

American Fork Mayor Heber Thompson said city officials have been working with UDOT for nearly two years to come up with a design and the city is excited for work to begin. The design should leave a lot of green space for the city and access to businesses and the new FrontRunner train will be very good, he said.

"I think it's really efficient and the best solution I've seen to this point," he said.

Mayor Thompson said he is not worried about any confusion with the new system. UDOT will be working to inform the public of the change, and once a motorist is on the road it will be hard to go the wrong way.

"I think the lights will regulate this very well," he said.